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ABSTRACT

This participant guide addresses the need for and attributes of school leadership in the new century. To implement this initiative, a steering committee has been assigned two tasks: (1) to find consensus and to report on the qualifications of school leaders in the 21st century; and (2) to design a professional development system that will support school leaders in acquiring understandings and skills listed in response to the first task. Participants are asked, using the information in the guide, its accompanying videotape, and from their own experience, to answer the question, "What do you expect school leaders to know, to do, and to be like?" To encourage discussion, three summaries of candidates' credentials and statements have been created for participants to consider. (DFR)

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Iowa Department of Education

ED 440 447

What Do We Want from Iowa School Leaders in the 21st Century?

Our Choices, Our Challenge

Iowa School Leadership Initiative
Educational Community Conversation

Participant Guide

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Foreword

The Iowa Department of Education and State Board of Education have selected school leadership as a top priority for 1999-2000. Retired Spirit Lake Superintendent Harold Overmann has been asked to direct a special initiative, which will address the need for and attributes of school leadership in the new century.

To implement this initiative, a steering committee of over 35 individuals representing various groups and regions of the state has been assigned two tasks:

1. Finding consensus and reporting what school leaders (administrators) need to know, to be able to do, and to be like in the 21st Century.

2. Designing a professional development system that will support school leaders in acquiring understandings and skills listed in response to task one above.

In workgroups, the steering committee will consider research, theory, and expert opinion about leadership. In addition, the committee is interested in Iowans' views about qualities and qualifications of school leaders. To assist the committee, area education agencies have organized fifteen community conversations throughout the state. Other organizations, agencies, and community groups may also organize conversations. These conversations will:

A. Gather information about what school leaders need to know, to be able to do, and to be like in the 21st Century.

B. Identify the areas of agreement, disagreement and concerns about the future of school leadership.

C. Increase understanding about the need for additional, and even more effective, school leaders.

A design team prepared materials for these conversations. The members of the team are:

Harold Overmann, School Leadership Consultant, Iowa Department of Education

Vicki Bird, New Iowa Schools Development Corporation

Mary Delagardelle, Iowa Association for School Boards

Peter Holly, New Iowa Schools Development Corporation

Jane Kearns, New Iowa Schools Development Corporation

Lana Michelson, Iowa Department of Education

Gerry Ott, New Iowa Schools Development Corporation

Elaine Smith-Bright, School Administrators of Iowa

Jim Sutton, Iowa State Education Association

David Wilkinson, New Iowa Schools Development Corporation

The steering committee will create an action plan using the results of this dialogue and its own research and deliberation.

Thank you to area education agencies and others who are organizing these conversations.

We appreciate your willingness to participate in this important dialogue!

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Candidate One, with a Ph.D. in school administration from a Midwestern university, specializes in K-12 curriculum and staff development. The candidate has a valid Iowa license, has been a principal and school superintendent in other districts, and has letters of recommendation from each.

Choice 2 **Candidate Two** 8

Candidate Two has an MBA from a major university, with an emphasis in budget and finance. After several years of success as a manager in a major Midwestern corporation, the candidate returned to the university to earn a superintendent's license. The candidate has experience as a school principal in another state, and has letters of recommendation.

Choice 3 **Candidate Three** 8

Candidate Three, with a doctoral degree from a major university, specializes in organizational theory and systems change. The candidate developed a nationally recognized program for improving school performance. Recently, the candidate has decided to return to school administration. The candidate has been a principal and school superintendent in other districts, and has letters of recommendation from each.

Prepared by the
New Iowa Schools Development Corporation

What Do We Want from Iowa School Leaders in the 21st Century?

Our Choices, Our Challenge

Iowa is on the brink of great crisis — finding enough effective, highly qualified leaders for schools. The crisis has developed over time and demands attention. You can contribute to a solution by participating in a "community conversation" about school leadership. This guide provides you with background information.

Evolving Challenges to Communities Affect Roles of School Leaders

In 1900, there were 16,335 schools operating as separate districts in Iowa; 12,623 of these were one-room schoolhouses. Fifty years later, there were over 4000 school districts in the state. During the 1950s and 1960s, state-prompted school district consolidation reduced this to fewer than 500. Consolidation challenged communities and school administrators.

First, consolidation placed leadership in the hands of fewer superintendents. Superintendents were asked to bus students farther distances to more buildings. Superintendents mediated disputes between communities embittered by consolidation. Rather than dealing with instructional issues, many disputes centered on a new district's athletic program, team mascot, or where teams would play games. The heat generated was painful.

These were the days of "baby boomers." As "boomers" moved through the system, schools were overcrowded and needed space. Life seemed easy as many left their houses and cars unlocked. All knew the families that lived on their block. Students generally obeyed dress codes and were respectful. Friday night football and basketball games reigned supreme. Threats to our way of life seemed distant. But, communism, the Cold War, and fear of nuclear war clouded optimism.

Then, the Russians launched *Sputnik*, a rocket that symbolized losing the Cold War. School leaders were asked to help win this contest. Every classroom reverberated from the satellite. Pressure to improve schools skyrocketed. Leaders were challenged to improve learning, especially in math and science. They responded with innovations; some worked, and others didn't.

From these challenges, new standards emerged. Most superintendents, principals and teachers adapted by learning new skills in professional development classes or reentering university programs. Others retired or were replaced.

Today's Challenges

The survival of whole communities and schools is at stake. Components of change compete for limited resources and present problems that lack easy solutions. This change has the same urgency as *Sputnik*. This time, however, solutions are less concrete, harder to pin down and more demanding of time and treasure.

For citizens, the first opportunity to notice these changes comes from local newspapers, radio or TV. School stories map challenges that schools must confront, including:

- Everchanging technology;
- Growing diversity in communities and values;
- Poverty rates;
- Vast differences in family circumstances;
- A desire for low taxes.

In each community, administrators are challenged to improve schools with fewer resources and more accountability. Again, whether reading the *Des Moines Register*, *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, the *Dallas County News* or any newspaper, the reader finds stories relating to:

Technology - At this moment, every community is changing because of technology. It affects how Iowans do business, how they vote, and how and where they learn. It eliminates boundaries. It accelerates action. How may schools harness this force?

Learning - In some schools, students are struggling with reading and math. Test scores are dropping. Improving students' reading, math, and science knowledge is the top priority of state policy. Under new state laws, schools are required to assess and report students' progress on a school-by-school basis. These reports allow parents and communities to compare their schools to others.

Innovation - Schools apply important trends and innovations used in business, such as outsourcing, merging, new relationships with clients, collaboration, and partnerships.

Research - Brain research has revolutionized our understanding of how children learn. This knowledge will greatly impact teaching and learning.

Poverty - There is increased poverty among less-educated Americans, and education is offered as the antidote.

Diverse Population - There are more immigrants in the U.S. today than at any time in our nation's history. New immigration has increased minority population in dozens of Iowa communities. Immigration has a positive economic impact on a community, but schools are challenged to meet new expectations and ensure all students succeed.

Infrastructure - Most school buildings are old. Most aren't equipped to utilize new technology. One town passed a $10 million bond issue to build a new high school while another town soundly defeated a sales tax referendum that would have both repaired old schools and constructed new ones.

School Safety - Bomb threats have been made throughout the state. Some parents, concerned over news of shootings and bomb threats, fear sending their child to school. Despite statistics to the contrary, they perceive schools as dangerous.

No More Expendable Students – In the past, students could drop out of school and thrive. If they were willing to work hard, they could still earn a middle-class salary. No longer; today many employers tell school leaders that graduates don't have the knowledge and skills to take on an entry-level position.

Challenges create stress. Mild stress can help schools and leaders improve. Pressure can operate like a new *Sputnik*, spawning new skills and know-how. Or, it can be awesome, overpowering and paralyzing.

Strong Management Skills Required

School leaders are and will always be expected to be good managers and overseers of the public investment in schools. Creating and implementing budgets, supervising personnel, implementing policy, and providing general direction for schools remain important.

Today, these skills are needed, but are not enough. As long as organizational change was not expected or required, leadership skills were not a top priority. Good management skills sufficed. The focus was on doing the same thing, but more efficiently. But, as society changes and new technologies emerge, transformation or profound change is expected and required, especially in schools. New leadership skills have become a priority.

The Emerging Importance of Vision

Almost all writers describe effective leadership as vision and/or mission-focused. Many say, "A leader without vision is not a leader." In the past, many thought vision was taboo; today it is essential. Arguments today are centered on whether vision is the exclusive responsibility of those at the top of the organization or the responsibility of all; whether a shared vision or a personal vision is most important.

Relationships

All accomplishments in organizations result from the people who work there. The relationships among these people leverage excellence in achievement. Today, strong relationships are essential to success. Conflict over ideas and priorities is healthy for an organization. Conflict that evolves on a personal basis is harmful. Negative relationships serve as a severe barrier to reform. Finding balance by providing opportunities for disagreement and dialogue about ideas supports healthy relationships. Maintaining healthy relationships is a challenge for leaders both today and tomorrow.

The Dilemma of Supply

As the demand for new school leaders soars, the number of those who want to become administrators is waning. Over 3,000 Iowa teachers have administrative credentials, but are not applying for principal, vice-principal, or superintendent vacancies. This creates a supply and demand problem. It is only exacerbated by the fact that many administrators are now at retirement age.

To compound the problem, as the number of minority students is increasing, the number of female and minority administrators is declining.

Administrators say that the increasing requirements of the job, its immense challenges, its loneliness and long hours, the time and expense of preparation or retraining, and other issues have lowered the attractiveness of the job. Job satisfaction is low. If these trends continue, Iowa's schools won't have the leaders they need.

Still, many believe that redefining school leadership and its professional development will encourage qualified, well-prepared people to seek leadership positions.

Preparation and Professional Development

Redesigning professional development to meet these new challenges is essential. Programs must continuously improve, even reinvent themselves. Some administrators describe instances

where this has already happened. Others complain of a huge gap between training needs and available programs.

Unique professional development models need to be designed to help aspiring school leaders acquire **what they need *to know, to be able to do, and to be like***. Similarly, new models of professional development need to support practicing school administrators in circumstances and situ tions in their own communities.

Now Is an Opportunity

Iowa's schools have always been among the nations finest. To remain so, communities and the state must address new challenges head-on by facing them. Now is the chance to focus attention on school leaders and act decisively.

Task and Contextual Factors

Using the information in this guide, its accompanying videotape and your experience, **what do you expect school leaders to know, to do, and to be like?**

You will meet with fellow participants in a structured dialogue on this question. To encourage deep discussion, three summaries of candidate's credentials and statements have been created for your consideration. After a discussion of these, you will be asked to list the qualities desired in leaders. We hope you discover agreements and disagreements, concerns, and issues for further study.

As you consider your views, it may be helpful to review factors that affect our communities today and in the immediate future. Regardless of the individual selected to lead a school or district, these factors must be assumed, even as a new vision for leadership emerges.

These are:

1. Financial resources available to schools will be limited.
2. Students, teachers, and others must be safe in school.
3. All children must learn, especially reading and math.
4. The populations of communities and schools will increase in diversity.
5. Economic situations and changing demographics will result in some communities and schools losing students while others gain.
6. Family structure and circumstances will continue to be varied.
7. A significant group of students will live in poverty.
8. The explosion of technology will continue and it will offer many new possibilities to schools.
9. Many Iowa school buildings are old.
10. New, unexpected issues will come to the forefront.
11. Brain-based research and other educational research will provide knowledge on how to improve learning, schools, and teaching.
12. Citizens will want to know what students are learning in schools.
13. Accountability will increase.
14. Strong relationships will be essential.

Summaries of Candidates' Credentials and Statements

As you consider these three candidates for a school superintendent position*:

- What are the strengths of each candidate?
- What concerns do you have with each candidate?
- What knowledge, skills and attitudes should a school leader possess?

* The specific tasks required of a principal, as compared to a superintendent, are different. Each requires a different emphasis. For the purpose of these discussions, it is assumed that leadership qualities of superintendents, principals, and central office staff are much more similar than different.

Candidate One

Candidate One, with a Ph.D. in school administration from a Midwestern university, specializes in K-12 curriculum and staff development. The candidate has a valid Iowa license, has been a principal and school superintendent in other districts, and has letters of recommendation from each.

"I think that school change depends on setting high expectations and sticking to them. People need to know what's expected and what they need to do in order to get results. I feel that everything needs to be aligned with these expectations. This includes teacher preparation, licensure, curriculum, testing, professional development, and compensation programs. The idea is to deliver the same message across all the major components of schooling. If everyone had the same high standards and works together, it would have a "system-wide" impact. Standards need to affect students' performance. Staff development is essential so that all learn what the standards and expectations are and then have the necessary skills to achieve them.

Academic standards and assessment should drive curriculum. Vision for the future needs to be home-grown and shared. That's the hard part, but I can do it. People have to be willing to work hard and improve what they do. Communication is very important. My responsibility is to meet with community leaders. I would stay out of the way of my associates as they administer policy and procedure. I've prepared myself fully as a complete school administrator, and I have experience. Responsible leadership requires us to stay within our financial resources, even if that means making hard choices. To get change, I would support standing back, taking a long, hard look, and then making adjustments in the school's program.

Of course, change takes a long time, about seven years. Unfortunately, it is also a reality that schools will have to live with limited resources. But with a strong leader, anything is possible."

Proponents of Candidate One say:

- This candidate emphasizes high and enforceable standards.
- The candidate has commitment to accountability for performance.
- The candidate is willing to "toe the line" with resources.

Critics of Candidate One say:

- This candidate relies on top-down expectations.
- This candidate does not listen to experience and knowledge of others in the organization.

Candidate Two

Candidate Two has an MBA from a major university, with an emphasis in budget and finance. After several years of success as a manager in a major Midwestern corporation, the candidate returned to the university to earn a superintendent's license. The candidate has experience as a school principal in another state, and has letters of recommendation.

"There's more to change than high expectations and training. Effective change needs real leadership. If I were hired, I would not implement a 'conveyor-belt approach' to change. This approach, I think, overlooks the impact of natural leaders. Some people have special talents. I believe in inspiring others, showing them a personal vision of what's possible and enlisting their support so something can really happen. Professional development is essential and must meet the individual needs of the staff.

I consider myself to be a natural leader. I have the ability to negotiate with diverse groups. I'm ready, willing and able to put myself on the line for kids. I believe my background in business and my rich management experiences have uniquely equipped me to face the challenges of leadership. I would seek out new funding from all sources. I believe that people should put action before theory, results ahead of feel-good programs. The world of work and society's needs should drive instruction, but overall direction should come from the board of directors. Communication is very important. It is a personal process that requires a "hands-on" approach. I would have an open-door policy and invite the business community to be an ongoing ally. I would put pressure on myself to do my best. Of course, change takes a long time, about four years. But with a strong leader anything is possible."

Proponents of Candidate Two say:

- This candidate seems to have natural leadership ability and a good head for business.
- This candidate has self-confidence.
- Leaders don't need formal training for what they already know how to do.
- As superintendent, this person would set a good example that others can emulate.

Critics of Candidate Two say:

- Formal training doesn't much matter to this candidate.
- Self-confidence is no substitute for empowering others to lead.
- Candidate did not mention the importance of standards and assessment as levers of change.
- Focus on personality shows no appreciation of curriculum or other factors.

Candidate Three

Candidate Three, with a doctoral degree from a major university, specializes in organizational theory and systems change. The candidate developed a nationally recognized program for improving school performance. Recently, the candidate has decided to return to school administration. The candidate has been a principal and school superintendent in other districts, and has letters of recommendation from each.

"I don't think schools can succeed unless everyone becomes a leader. I think change demands initiative from everyone. In districts where I've been the superintendent, I have attempted to empower teachers and other employees to make needed changes in their daily work so students can learn at their best. This works best if people are organized into teams or quality circles. I would 'widen the leadership net' so change can be structured to occur continuously. We wouldn't have to motivate teachers to do this; they already want to. The key is to have everyone in a school district making decisions not just those at the top. If I were hired, I wouldn't see my job as the only person appointed to lead. I'd want to empower others to lead. I'd want to create schools where everyone can contribute his/her best. That's what it's all about.

Staff development is essential. It should support the work of the schools and district by helping staff members acquire process skills of teamwork and collaboration. Those skills can be used to address any district challenge. With the right management information system, I would strive to supply teachers with information that enable them to make adjustments in instruction. This will require new resources, but the students' learning needs should drive instruction. Communication is very important. It is through good communication that information for good decisions is found. Community engagement is important to assess needs and build support. Of course, change takes a long time, about five years. But with a strong leader and strong teams anything is possible"

Proponents of Candidate Three say:

- This candidate has a strong emphasis on empowering people.
- The candidate supports teams that can set their own goals and account for results.
- The candidate seems to be a "people person."
- The candidate sees value in the experience and wisdom of others

Critics of Candidate Three say:

- The candidate's emphasis is on collaboration that really wastes time.
- The candidate would break our budget with meetings and substitute pay.
- The candidate did not mention the importance of standards and assessment as levers of change.

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Iowa Department of Education
Grimes State Office Building
Des Moines, IA 50319-0146
Phone: 515-281-5663 Fax: 515-281-7700
Harold Overmann, School Leadership Consultant
harold.overmann@ed.state.ia.us